

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LAGOS 01481 141643Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7997

INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMCONSUL KADUNA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 1481

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, NI

SUBJECT: LABOR, POLITICS, AND NIGERIAN STABILITY

REF: LAGOS 973

SUMMARY: GOWON'S CONVICTION REPORTED REFTEL THAT "ILL-MOTIVATED ELEMENTS" SEEKING CAPITALIZE ON LABOR UNREST FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES REMAINS HARD TO PROVE CONCLUSIVELY, THOUGH NUMBER OF RECENT EVENTS SUGGEST THAT POLITICAL AGITATORS MAY WELL BE ABROAD IN THE LAND. NEVERTHELESS, LABOR UNREST REMAINS PRIMARILY ECONOMIC IN MOTIVATION, AND POLITICAL AGITATION STILL SEEMS UNLIKELY TO DO MORE THAN TEMPORARILY EMBARRASS FMG. END SUMMARY.

1. IN BOTH LAGOS AND KADUNA, NUMBER OF WELL-INFORMED NIGERIANS CONTINUE TO TELL US UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT CURRENT WAVE OF LABOR UNREST IS MORE "POLITICAL" THAN ECONOMIC. CONSULATE KADUNA HAS BEEN TOLD BY SEVERAL SOURCES THAT THEY BELIEVE "YORUBAS" ARE PRINCIPAL EXPLOITERS OF LABOR UNREST, BUT CONSULATE DOES NOT BELIEVE THIS VIEW IS WIDELY HELD. LAGOS SOURCES WHO SEE POLITICAL AGITATION AT WORK, INCLUDING SOME YORUBAS, HAVE AVOIDED SPECIFYING ITS SOURCE, BUT IMPLICATION HERE AS AMONG NORTHERN PROPONENTS OF THEORY IS THAT PRINCIPAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LAGOS 01481 141643Z

CULPRITS ARE AWOLOWO AND FORMER ACTION GROUP ACCOCIATES.

2. CONSULATE IBADAN, HOWEVER, HAS FOUND NO EVIDENCE THAT AWOLOWO AND OTHER YOURBA CRITICS OF FMG ARE ACTIVELY WHIPPING UP LABOR UNREST, THOUGH THEY ARE PROBABLY ENJOYING FMG DISCOMFITURE AND HOPING GAIN INFLUENCE TO EXTENT THAT REGIME IS DISCREDITED. SINCE AWOLOWO AND HIS COLLEAGUES PRESUMABLY WELL AWARE THAT GOWON WARNING (REFTEL), LIKE TOUGH ROTIMI SPEECH LAST FALL, AIMED PRIMARILY AT ACTION GROUP ELEMENTS AND SUGGESTS FMG READINESS USE THEM AS SCAPEGOATS, CONSULATE BELIEVES THEY ARE LIEKLY MAINTAIN LOW PROFILE IN ORDER TO AVOID GIVING FMG PRETEXT FOR ACTION AGAINST THEM.

3. NEVERTHELESS, MORE OPEN AWOLOWO ROLE SUGGESTED BY RECENT CONTENT OF ACTION-GROUP-CONTROLLED NIGERIAN TRIBUNE, WHICH HAS ASSIDUOUSLY REPORTED EVERY INCIDENT OF LABOR UNREST AND HAS RUN SERIES OF CRITICAL EDITORIALS ABOUT FMG POLICY ON UDOJI ISSUES. TRIBUNE HAS ALSO BELABORED FMG ON OTHER MATTERS, MOST RECENTLY IN FEBRUARY 13 EDITORIAL URGING RELEASE OF DETAINEE AIR IYARE IN TERMS ECHOING CURRENT STUDENT DEMANDS (SEPTTEL). TRIBUNE SEEMINGLY WAS PREPARED ADD FURTHER FUEL TO FIRE BY RUNNING MUCH-BALLYHOOED STORY ON JANUARY 1966 COUP, PUBLICATION OF WHICH BLOCKED AT LAST MINUTE BY NIGERIAN POLICE.

4. IN ADDITION TO TRIBUNE CONTENT, SEVERAL RECENT EVENTS SUGGEST SOME POLITICAL HAND MAY WELL BE AT WORK. MOST STRIKING INCIDENT WAS CIRCULATION OF FALSE MILITARY SALARY SCALE (REFTEL) ALLEGING THAT ARMED FORCES WOULD BE PAID AT DOUBLE THE RATES ESTABLISHED FOR THEIR POLICE AND CIVILIAN COUNTERPARTS. RUMORED PAYSACLE PROVIDED OSTENSIBLE ISSUE FOR BRIEF STUDENT BOYCOTT AT AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, FOR EXAMPLE, AND WAS VIEWED BY FMG WITH SUFFICIENT CONCERN THAT FORMAL DENIAL OF ITS VALIDITY WAS ISSUED. IN WAKE WIDE CIRCULATION OF FALSE SCALE, THERE WERE UNSUBSTANTIATED REPORTS OF CLASHES WITHIN MILITARY ALONG TRIBAL LINES (HAUSA VERSUS YORUBA) AND RUMOR THAT AWOLOWO HAD BEEN ARRESTED FOR ALLEGED ROLE IN DISTRIBUTING MILITARY PAYSACLE.

5. CURRENT STUDENT UNREST REPORTED SEPTTEL MAY ALSO INVOLVE POLITICAL AGITATION. MID-WESTERN STATE GOVERNMENT-OWNED OBSERVER CHARGES IN FEBRUARY 14 ISSUE THAT UNIVERSITY OF IFE STUDENTS "HAD CONSIDERABLE BACKING FROM OUTSIDE THE CAMPUS" AND CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LAGOS 01481 141643Z

THAT UNREST IN UNIVERSITIES GENERALLY "WAS HIGHLY ORGANIZED AND HAD MATERIAL AND MORAL SUPPORT FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES." HIGHLY POLITICAL DEMANDS ADVANCED BY STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITIES OF IFE, LAGOS, AND IBADAN LEND CREDENCE TO OBSERVER CHARGE, BUT HARD EVIDENCE OF OUTSIDE INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO PRODUCE.

6. AT BEST, EVIDENCE OF POLITICAL AGITATION IS FRAGMENTARY AND

CIRCUMSTANTIAL. RUMORS REPORTED PARA 4, FOR EXAMPLE, COULD EITHER HAVE BEEN SIMPLE PRODUCTS OF OVERCHARGED ATMOSPHERE OR DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO INFLAME SITUATION. SIMILARLY, STUDENT UNREST NOTED PARAGRAPH 5 COULD ONCE AGAIN BE CASE OF STUDENTS BEING CARRIED AWAY BY THEIR OWN RHETORIC RATHER THAN PRODUCT OF OUTSIDE INFLUENCE AS OBSERVER HAS CHARGED. EVEN TRIBUNE EDITORIALS CITED PARA 3 WOULD DOUBTLESS BE DEFENDED BY PAPER AS CONSTRUCTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL DEBATE RATHER THAN EFFORT TO CAUSE TROUBLE FOR FMG.

7. NEVERTHELESS, CUMULATIVE IMPACT OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS SUGGESTS THAT SMOKE IS BECOMING TOO THICK TO DISMISS LIKELIHOOD SOME FIRE IS PRESENT. SINCE MOST DISTURBANCES HAVE BEEN CONCENTRATED IN YORUBA AREAS, PRINCIPAL SUSPICION TENDS FALL ON AWOLOWO AND COMPANY NO MATTER HOW LOW THEIR VISIBLE PROFILE, BUT THERE MAY WELL BE OTHERS STILL HIDDEN FROM VIEW WHO WOULD HOPE TO PROFIT FROM DISCREDITING FMG. LABOR UNREST IN WAKE OF UDOJI REPORT MAY SIMPLY HAVE BEEN TEMPTATION TOO GREAT TO RESIST, AND INDECISIVE FMG RESPONSE PRESUMABLY MADE OPPORTUNITY APPEAR EVEN MORE PROMISING.

8. IMPACT OF SUCH AGITATION AS MAY HAVE OCCURRED, HOWEVER, HAS THUS FAR BEEN RELATIVELY MINIMAL. LABOR UNREST, WHICH STEMS FROM GENUINE ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES IN BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS, NEEDED NO POLITICAL STIMULATION, AND INDEED APPEARS TO HAVE PASSED ITS PEAK DESPITE WHATEVER EFFORTS "AGITATORS" MAY BE MAKING TO KEEP IT STIRRED UP. RUMORS AND STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS MAY EMBARRASS FMG AND DISTRACT ITS ATTENTION, BUT THEY HAVE NOT ALTERED ITS POLICIES OR PRACTICES NOR MADE IT MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO AFFECTIVE CHALLENGE FROM OUTSIDE MILITARY RANKS. SO LONG AS REGIME MAINTAINS ITS COHESIVENESS AND NO UNFORESEEN EVENT OCCURS TO COALESCE PRESENTLY DISPARATE AND DISORGANIZED OPPOSITION, FMG REMAINS RELATIVELY IMMUNE TO AGITATION AND

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 LAGOS 01481 141643Z

SHOULD HAVE LITTLE DIFFICULTY IN WEATHERING PRESENT STORM.
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